

## American Community Survey Fact Sheet

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America is changing, and so is the census. Beginning in 2005, a rolling sample of housing unit addresses nationwide will receive questionnaires from the new American Community Survey each month. The survey collects demographic, socio-economic and housing data – the same type of information that has been collected every 10 years from the long-form questionnaire of the census, which the American Community Survey will replace.

By 2010—sooner for more populous areas—American communities will no longer need to wait 10 years for an up-to-date statistical “snapshot.” Instead, the American Community Survey will provide an annual moving picture of community characteristics. Elected officials, community leaders and businesses will have access to current data to address a wide range of current social and economic issues – a more efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

### What?

- **WHAT IT IS.** The American Community Survey is a nationwide survey designed to give communities current, and accurate information every year about their demographic, socio-economic and housing characteristics.
- **SHORT FORM-ONLY CENSUS.** The American Community Survey is scheduled to replace the long form in the decennial (once every 10 years) census, beginning in 2010. From that time on, censuses will consist of a short form only. This is expected to result in operational efficiencies, cost savings and anticipated higher response rates.
- **QUALITY TESTING.** The American Community Survey has been tested since 1996 to ensure that it will yield the same high quality data as the census long form.
- **QUESTIONS.** There are more than 60 questions on the American Community Survey, and they are comparable to those on the Census 2000 long form. Questions are mandated by federal law, federal regulations and court decisions.
- **WHERE THE QUESTIONS COME FROM.** For background information on each question, go to:  
<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/SQuest/fact.htm>.

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- **CONFIDENTIALITY.** All individual census answers are anonymous and confidential. Any Census Bureau employee who violates their oath of confidentiality is subject to a prison term, a fine, or both.

**Who?**

- **RECIPIENTS.** In the United States and Puerto Rico, about 250,000 addresses per month, or 2.5 percent per year, will receive the survey. This is equal to about 1-in-480 households a month, or 1-in-40 a year. During Census 2000, about 1-in-6 households received the long form.
- **SMALLER AREAS.** A larger proportion of addresses in small governmental units (American Indian reservations, small counties and towns) will receive the survey. The monthly sample size is designed to approximate the ratio used in Census 2000, requiring more intensive distribution in these areas.
- **MINIMIZING BURDEN.** The odds of receiving the American Community Survey in any 10-year period are less than 1-in-4. No address will receive the survey more than once in any five-year period.

**Where?**

- **LOCATIONS.** Once it is fully implemented, the American Community Survey will be in every county, American Indian reservation, Alaska Native tribal area, and Hawaiian homeland in the United States.

**When?**

- **START.** The full nationwide mailout is currently scheduled to start in January 2005, with a new mailing each successive month. The ACS has been operating in 1,239 counties across the nation since 2000.
- **RESULTS.** Under the current timetable, annual results will be available for areas with populations of 65,000 or more beginning in the summer of 2006, for areas with populations of 20,000 or more in the summer of 2008, and for all areas—down to census tract level—by the summer of 2010. This schedule is based on the time it will take to collect data from a sample size large enough to produce accurate results for different size geographic units.

**Why?**

- **TEN YEARS IS TOO LONG FOR COMMUNITIES TO WAIT FOR CURRENT DATA.** With the American Community Survey, for the first time communities will have current information to assess local needs, such as where to build new roads, schools or senior centers. The survey also will help ensure that communities get their fair share of government and business funding.

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- **CURRENT DATA ARE CRITICAL.** Every year, more than \$200 billion in federal funds are awarded to localities based on census numbers. Federal agencies currently are reviewing policies that would fund changes on a more timely basis.
- **TIMELINESS IS MONEY.** The American Community Survey not only can save money, it also can avoid costly mistakes—such as deciding to build an elementary school in the wrong place.
- **IMPROVING THE NEXT CENSUS.** The American Community Survey also will improve census operations by streamlining address updates and allowing the census to focus on its constitutionally mandated purpose: counting the population.
- **AUTHORITY.** The American Community Survey is part of the ten-year census. As such, its legal authority derives from the same statutes that authorize the census: Title 13 of the U.S. Code, Sections 141 and 193. As with the ten-year census, responding to the American Community Survey is mandatory.

#### How?

- **RESPONSES AND FOLLOW-UP.** Surveys will be mailed every month to a random sample of addresses in each county. If a household does not respond in six weeks, Census Bureau staff will attempt to contact the respondent by telephone to complete the survey. If that, too, fails, 1-in-3 households remaining will be visited by Census Bureau staff for an in-person interview.
- **FOLLOW-UP COSTS.** The cost to taxpayers of a follow-up interview for households that do not mail back their completed questionnaires is up to ten times greater than if the questionnaire were received by mail.

For more information, visit the American Community Survey Web page at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www>.

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